# GALLERY 26

## RESTRAINED AND RESTLESS FORMS OF ART

In recent years, contemporary art has often been characterized by such adjectives as "bombastic," "violent," "brutal," "anguished," and "anxious." The spontaneous gesture has frequently been stressed as a means for releasing the energies of the "subconscious." Large and dramatic paintings have seemed to dominate the art scene much as the big canvases by the Romantic artists dominated an earlier period. Some very important works of art have been created under the rubric "Abstract-Expressionism" - or, if you prefer, "Action Painting." Among the more unfortunate side effects, however, has been a tendency for this kind of art to monopolize the center of the stage and public attention, thus seeming to force to the wings works that speak in more muted tones. Those familiar with the play often continue to watch and appreciate the subtleties, but those less familiar with the drama often overlook them when the more volatile performers are on stage.

Perhaps it should be stressed that the more temperate artists have not just arrived on stage, they have been there all along. Generally, they have been satisfied to do their best for a limited but perceptive audience, and for their own satisfaction. Many of their names have long been well known: Gyorgy Kepes was at the Bauhaus; Loren MacIver emerged as an important artist in the late 1930's and early 1940's; Mark Tobey is the dean of American abstractionists; Hajdu has long been reckoned among the leading sculptors in France as has Harry Bertoia in this country; only the Japanese sculptor, Nagare, is a relative newcomer. These artists are not similar in aim or style, a quiet voice is really all they have in common. Quietude should not be confused with weakness however, their tones are insistent and poignant, as well as subtle.

Gyorgy Kepes has been Professor of Visual Design, School of Architecture and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, since 1946. He has been described as ". . . one of the most articulate and able champions of the 'New Vision' with all its stark and rational implications with design and industry." His numerous writings, including a most significant book, "Language of Vision," are lucid, precise, and clear. In them he seems to realize what words can do best. His paintings, on the other hand, are more poetic, although his method is more purposeful than intuitive. He aims to create forms which will control the observer's eye - and responses - as he gently leads them into a more mysterious area beyond the reach of common sense statements. Colors are glazed over thickly encrusted underpainting. Textures, shadowed forms, softly glowing hues, irregular shapes and lines combine to create forms vaguely reminiscent of the earth's surface, minerals, plant roots, and all such natural things. Thus, his paintings - seemingly abstractions - still refer to the world

of nature. They relate the outer world and the inner world - as Kepes has said - "inducing inner pictures of the outer environment - pictures shaped with sympathy, with the joys and sorrows, fears and hopes in the heart of man. And above all the work of art has sustained man with visions of a felt order. It has returned understanding to the indispensable eye, the foundation of our thought and feeling the core of experience."

Loren MacIver is not as theoretically consistent as Kepes. Her paintings also refer to the outside world, but she apparently does not consciously attempt to guide the eyes and responses of the observer. Her approach to painting seems truly naive, in the best sense. Her works constantly vary in style, technique, and even subject. The record of her experience of the world (defined in her paintings) is hauntingly fresh, gay, and often wistful. It is child-like in its wonder at ordinary sights: the flicker of a lamp, the irridescent glow of a film of oil on a puddle of water, the soft feel of rain. She seems entranced by the world and - above all - by its enigmas. Her work is related to that of many other artists - Klee, Tobey, John Marin - yet her poetry is uniquely her own. She follows no theory, doctrine, or habit; her paintings reflect her spontaneous responses to life and the world.

Mark Tobey uses the calligraphic brushstroke as the building block of his art. Sometimes fluid, sometimes precise, sharp, and angular, it is always elegant and expressive, as one might expect from an artist who is so sympathetic to Oriental art and thought. Tobey was born in 1890. His first one-man show (at M. Knoedler & Co.) was held in 1917, long before many of the abstract artists so well known today were born. Certainly the de-centralized, "all-over" character of his paintings preceded Jackson Pollock's larger scaled works by many years. This by no means invalidates Pollock's significance, it only points up the fact that there were serious abstract artists of importance on the scene well before the upsurge of attention given to the so-called "School of New York" after World War II.

Etienne Hajdu comes from a Hungarian background although he has long been part of the School of Paris. He studied briefly with Bourdelle, but he has been much more influenced by his first-hand experience of Greek and Cycladic sculpture, Romanesque figures, and the work of Brancusi. Strangely enough, for an artist who exploits the purity and sensuous qualities of marble so successfully, he does not accept the idea of the importance of the material in determing the form of the work of art. "Art begins," he has said "when the material ends." The material he views as a means to an end - the end being an Idea.

Harry Bertoia was born in Italy in 1915. He has long been a resident of this country and is perhaps best known for his architectural sculpture. Always aware of texture, pattern, and color, he is willing - like the Romanesque and Gothic artists - to conceive his sculpture as an integral part of an architectural unit. Yet (as with medieval art) it obviously functions independently as well.

The youngest of these artists, Masayuki Nagare, was born in 1923 in Japan where he still lives most of the time. Many of his works are in stone, to which he seems to respond with great sensitivity. The abstract forms are graceful while retaining the sense of mass and weight inherent in the material.

Smoothly finished surfaces are contrasted by rough, irregular, pitted ends and edges where the forms seem to break off. Thus elegance is joined with rough strength - a union which has traditionally yielded important results. But Nagare's place in this exhibition is due to the apparent simplicity and quietude which contains many subtleties of form and to his lack of bombast and self-dramatization.

The present exhibition is by no means an effort to oppose any particular movements or styles in contemporary art. It is intended only to illuminate the work of several significant artists who speak in subdued - not weak - tones.

HARRY BERTOIA

"Untitled"
Bronze and brass 1959

Lent by Staempfli Gallery, New York

ÉTIENNE HAJDU

"Femme en Noir"
Black marble 1960

"Odile"
Marble 1964

Lent by M. Knoedler & Co., Inc., New York

GYORGY KEPES

"Color Ambush 1961"
Oil

"Birmingham Sept. 15, 1963"
Oil

"Pigment Lake"
Oil 1961

Lent by Swetzoff Gallery, Boston

"Pigment Forest"
Oil 1964

"Color Lullaby"
Oil 1964

"Dialogue of Lights"
Oil 1964

"Serene and Aloof"
Oil 1964

Lent by Saidenberg Gallery, New York

LOREN MACIVER

"Défense de Stationner"
Oil 1963

"Rue de la Tombe-Issoire"
Oil 1963

"Spécialités"
Oil 1964

Lent by Pierre Matisse Gallery Corp., New York

MASAYUKI NAGARE

"Windwoven"
Stone 1963

Collection Mr. and Mrs. George W. Staempfli

MARK TOBEY

"Universal City"
Tempera 1951

"Visual Extensions"
Water Color and Ink 1950

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Dan R. Johnson

"Trembling Space"
Tempera 1961

Willard Gallery, New York

*Some of the works in this exhibition are for sale. For further information please inquire at the Information Desk or call Extension 331.*